

Avian flu subtypes have been detected in two apparently healthy wild Northern pintail ducks that were killed recently by a hunter in Ottawa County. Officials from the U.S. Department of Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture made the announcement on Saturday.

They said that although H5 and N1 avian influenza subtypes were found in the ducks, the samples did not contain the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain that has spread through birds in Asia, Europe and Africa. There have been no known cases of H5N1 in the United States.

Initial tests on the pintails detected the presence of H5 and low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) virus, which poses no threat to human health. Confirmatory testing is underway at the National Veterinary Service Laboratories in Ames, Iowa and will clarify whether one or more strains of the virus are present, the specific subtype, and also confirm the pathogenicity. Results are expected in two to three weeks.

Federal officials said low pathogenic avian influenza is not uncommon in wild birds and usually causes only minor sickness in the birds. These strains of the virus include LPAI H5N1, commonly referred to as "North American" H5N1, which is very different from the more severe HPAI H5N1 circulating overseas.

Officials also said there is no known health risk to hunters or hunting dogs from contact with low pathogenic forms of avian influenza virus. Nevertheless, hunters are always encouraged to use common sense sanitation practices, such as hand washing and thorough cooking, when handling or preparing wildlife of any kind. DOI has issued guidelines for safe handling and preparation of wild game.

For more information about USDA's efforts and research related to avian influenza, go to <http://www.usda.gov/birdflu>.

For more information about Interior's efforts and hunter education program, go to <http://www.doi.gov/issues/avianflu.html>

For information about the federal government's overall efforts related to avian influenza and human pandemic preparedness, go to <http://www.avianflu.gov> .